

**THE GEORGIAN TERM *MORTULEBA*, AN EQUIVALENT
TO THE WORD HARMONY IN IOANE PETRITSI'S WORK
GANMARTEBAI.. (THE INTERPRETATION)**

From the viewpoint of the study of Georgian polyphony the most significant historical document is the work of the 11th-century Georgian philosopher Ioane Petritsi "Interpretation of the Philosophy of Proclus Diodochos and Plato". It includes quite logical, very interesting musical parallels substantiating polyphony.

Ioane Petritsi's vocabulary contains very valuable material from his epoch on the musical terminology, which is directly connected with polyphony. Particularly interesting is the fact that Georgian philosopher ignores the category of "harmony", widely accepted in the philosophical vocabulary of his time. Instead of the term "harmony", which in ancient Greek culture denoted a monophonic, linear musical development, the Georgian philosopher used the notions stemming from the national vocabulary, such as *narti*, *rtva*, *mortuli*, *mrtveli*,¹ and so on. From the viewpoint of understanding musical dialectics there is a great qualitative difference between the content of the Greek term "harmony" and its corresponding Georgian terms.

Petritsi's musical *mortuleba* denotes a musical analogue of the divine Holy Trinity, a dialectal unity of three voices realized in the vertical, so common to the Georgian vocal music. The present work is intended to thoroughly understand the essence of the terminology Ioane Petritsi uses in connection with music and collates it with the Greek understanding of harmony.

Of all the ideas the Greek classical thinking bequeathed to aesthetic history of mankind the most significant is the Pythagorean thinking. The most important conclusion the Pythagorean aesthetics made about musical art is that he cognised the main essence of music, introduced a dialectical moment in his teaching and was the first to define harmony as a unity of contradictions. Such an understanding of harmony was widely accepted afterwards and conditioned the future of understanding this notion for centuries to come. In the course of time in the history of the development of the world aesthetics harmony became one of the most widespread notions having very wide meaning. It could with equal success be used both in connection with the terrestrial and cosmic worlds, the physical and moral beauty, regularity of aesthetic perception and the intrinsic dialectics of the simplest sound sequences – "harmonies" or of the antique modes. Though, it should be remembered that since Greek music was not aware of polyphony, its understanding of musical harmony in essence was a notion denoting a melodic (linear) dialectics (Riman,1901:400).

Summing up the antique teaching about harmony V. Shestakov notes that in spite of its great achievements, the antique aesthetics failed to show due respect for artistic harmony. Out of the mathematic, aesthetic and artistic harmonies antique aesthetics was the least interested in the artistic harmony and when trying to understand harmony

in art it resorted to mathematical dimensions, thus ignoring the intrinsic dialectics of the arts (Shestakov, 1973:52).

As for Petritsi, the musical analogues present in “The Interpretation” provide grounds to think that the fact that Petritsi’s great interest in musical art in connection with his theological and philosophical problems, besides pure aesthetic interest, must have been conditioned by the regularity of musical art proper and the dialectical principle the philosopher saw in national music. It is evident that unlike Antique aesthetics, due to its regularities Petritsi considers musical art an independent category, hence it is the artistic harmony, which is so weakly developed in Antique aesthetics, that is assigned such a significant place in the aesthetics of the Georgian thinker (Pirtskhalava, 1994:89).

There are many cases in “The Interpretation” where the philosopher’s attitude towards music is expressed. Petritsi’s argumentations about music and the musical parallels he uses as an artistic means to more clearly present different theological or philosophical problems, cause a dual reaction on the part of both readers and researchers: 1) On the one hand Petritsi takes into consideration the data of the Antique musical aesthetics and shares them; 2) On the other hand the theological-philosophical problems chosen for discussion, his “view” of them – his special attitude to “the Holy Trinity”, his way of thinking with the Trinity in mind, the principle of searching for the power of the Trinity in any phenomenon or action, is quite evident in his every musical parallel. From this viewpoint Petritsi’s “view” of the phenomenon of musical art in general or musical regularities essentially differs from the Antique musical-aesthetic thinking.

With all this in mind and in connection with polyphony the musical parallels occurring in his work may be divided into two categories: a) Parallels where the philosopher speaks covertly, only alluding to the regularities of musical dialectics he discovered in musical art (Petritsi, 1943:17, 22, 151, 196); b) a musical parallel where Petritsi specifically names three independent parts and speaks about the musical dialectics of the three-part singing realized in the vertical (Petritsi, 1937:221). Accordingly the Georgian notions corresponding to harmony, which occur in these musical parallels, carry different messages: a) in a number of cases their semantic charge is identical to the all-embracing antique harmony and can refer to any kind of harmony. In “The Interpretation” there are different kinds of *mortulobebi* (“harmonies”): *bunebit mortuleba* (“natural harmony”), *arsta mortuleba* (“harmony of creatures”), *ritskhvta mortuleba* (“harmony of numbers”), *tsiury mortuleba* (“celestial harmony”), *skheulebriv mortuleba* (“harmony of the body”) and the most important for our subject – *samusta rtvai da mortuleba* (“harmony of musical instruments”); b) In a number of other cases the musical dialectics acknowledged by Petritsi has the national foundation, and its *mortuleba* is a notion essentially different from the Antique harmony (Iashvili, 1978:36; Pirtskhalava, 2002:112). As a rule *narti*, *rtva*, *martva*, *mrtveli*, *mortuli*, *mortuleba* are used in reference to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the Holy Trinity, the image of the triune supreme beginning and also in connection with the phenomena, which reflect the harmonious meaning of the union of the Holy Trinity. In its character the thinking of the great Georgian theologian and philosopher is

generalized and comprehensive, and though he never created special musical treatises, his musical ideas only contain and envisage all the musical information known at that time, even that which the Greeks possessed and acknowledged, and the more so, the information which Georgian musical thinking possessed and presented. It is another question, which one is selected and given priority to by the Georgian thinker when searching for the musical parallel of the divine Holy Trinity among them. It is clearly indicated in the *Bolositqva* (“Afterword”) to his work. Since in the given paper I am unable to dwell on each of the musical parallels presented in “The Interpretation” I will limit myself only to the most significant specimens.

Petritsi, *Bolositqva* (Afterword): quotation of a musical parallel (Petritsi, 1937:221; Melikishvili, 1999:211 “As for music our universe is music entirely, harmonized by the Holy Ghost, and so is every whole, *ertobai sheqovlebit* –simultaneous sounding of different pitches (unity of different elements, parts) cohered by the three voices, that are called *mzakhri* (“the lead part”), *zhiri* (“the middle part”) and *bam* (“the bass part”), and any harmony of the voices and strings. It is these three that create sweet tunes, since the coordination of dissimilar voices generates harmony. The same can be said of the Holy Trinity: we acknowledge the manifestation of the Son born of God and the Holy Ghost and the unity of the multifarious nature created by them.

Hence, here, in the different parts of music – *mzakhri*, *zhiri* and *bami*– you will see the unity of the whole, God, the creator in his supreme mind harmonized and filled with music the body of His every creation and sent forth different kinds in striving for creating variations of one and the same things”. Thus, in the analogue quoted above *mortuleba* (“the harmony”) formed by simultaneous sounding of three voices (parts), (harmony of voices and strings) is viewed by Petritsi as the most exact musical reflection of the trinity of the Supreme One.

In Petritsi’s philosophy great significance is attached to a well-known thesis about the so-called *sashuali* (“intermediate”), stemming from Aristotle’s “Analytics”; the notion of *sashuali* or the centre was very significant in every sphere of Greek learning, art or philosophy... The greatest importance of this category in arithmetics, geometry and music may be considered to have been already confirmed. Greeks saw some kind of unity in everything, which meant that first of all they found the centre of the subject (phenomenon) under study – “the intermediate”. It is the way the musical interconnection of the extreme sounds of the Greek mode *nita* and *gipata* and *messa*, the latter occupying the central position between the former two, was perceived (Losev, 1964:355; 1960:276).

The fragments of chapters 106 and 190, which I found interesting deal with the soul, which performs the function of the so-called *sashuali* (intermediate), cohering the two extremes – the bases (sources) – the eternal, timeless heaven and the mortal, earthly world. Petritsi (Petritsi) perceives the dialectics *ziareba* (“communion”) of the interconnection of the heaven, the earth and the soul as an interconnection equal to the musical regularities, which he calls *ketilmusikeloba* (“music pleasant to the ear”). In order to corroborate the above theological issue he suggests its original figurative explanation on the example of music: – He remembers the *samusiko rtvai* (“musical harmony”) of God or the best *mrtveli* (“harmonizer”) and master who creates

the musical harmony (*samusiko rtvai*), where, as in the case of the heaven, the earth and the soul *sashuali* (“intermediate”) join and turn into a single whole, the extremes which are different from each other, have nothing in common (Ioane Petritsi, 1937:196). If we revert to the musical perception of the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) from the afterword of his work (the harmony of *mzakhri* – the lead part, *zhiri* – the middle part and the bass part), if we take into account how important the notion of *sashuali* (“intermediate”) is in Petritsi's philosophy, it may be presumed that the dialectics of the voices sounding in the vertical, characteristic of Georgian music, as an expression of the Georgian method of musical thinking, was adjusted to the Antique *sashuali* (“intermediate”) by Petritsi, and in such a way that Aristotle's *sashuali* (“intermediate”) and “the two extremes” were raised in height and Petritsi, who firmly stood on the national basis, gave the horizontal dialectics of the antique harmony a vertical position.

In most cases it is such musical dialectics that he means in his musical analogues.

Such a musical view presented by the Georgian thinker in his “afterword”, the musical specimen he specially refers to, becomes the most significant argument which eliminates all the doubts as to the presence of polyphony and its corresponding musical terminology in Georgia in the 11th century. “The Afterword” with its well-known musical analogy is the very key which may be considered as a cipher, a code that can be used in the process of research into the musical analogues presented in Ioane Petritsi's work on aesthetic musical thinking and in interpreting the ideas meant in them.

The fact that the Georgian philosopher thought very much about the issues of music is attested not only in the work mentioned above, but also in his translation made much earlier chronologically, here I mean his translation of Nemesius of Emesa's work “On Human Nature”, where the words with *narti* root corresponding to the notion of harmony are explained and used very frequently in the philosopher's vocabulary (Petritsi, 1914:32).

Note

¹*Narti* – direct, rough translation is “to spin”, “yarn”, “thread”.

Mrtveli – in Petritsi's figurative vocabulary it is the same as *khelovant mtavari* (“Chief of Artists”, i.e. one who puts a tune to the texts of hymns, a professional creating the melody, a synonym of today's composer).

In “Interpretation” the philosopher refers to music: in “The Foreword”, in chapters one and two (Petritsi, 1937: 17,22), in chapter eight (ibid: 34), in chapter 28 (ibid.: 76), in chapter 34 (ibid:87), in chapters 41, 50, 51 (ibid,100, 108, 110), in chapters 106 and 190 (ibid,154, 196).

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